



News Release

Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region External Affairs Office

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RARE PLANT REBOUNDS; U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES TO UPGRADE STATUS OF ENDANGERED MISSOURI BLADDERPOD

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife service today proposed changing the status of the Missouri bladderpod from endangered to threatened – reflecting the fact that this small, flowering plant is making progress toward recovery.

Found in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas, the Missouri bladderpod was listed as endangered in 1987. Under the Endangered Species Act, an endangered species is one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. Threatened species are those that are likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

The Service's proposal, published in today's *Federal Register*, cites several factors in the species' progress, including successful management techniques to enhance and protect existing populations, expansion of existing populations, and discovery of new populations. The total population of the Missouri bladderpod was estimated to be about 11,000 individuals at nine sites in three Missouri counties when the species was listed as endangered. Threats to the species identified at the time of listing were vulnerability due to low population size; overcollection and human disturbance; lack of information on beneficial management techniques; seed predation by insects; and lack of protection on private property. A recovery plan was completed in 1988.

Since its listing as endangered in 1987, biologists and researchers have discovered that the greatest threats to the bladderpod include overgrazing, urban development, and lack of management of its "glade" habitat to control encroachment by woody plants and aggressive "non-native" pasture grasses. Surveys conducted after the listing yielded 52 new populations of Missouri bladderpod in Missouri and the species was discovered at two sites in Arkansas. Protection of habitat and use of various management techniques such as prescribed burns improved bladderpod habitat. In years when climate and soil conditions are optimum for the species, population estimates may exceed 500,000 plants at all sites combined.

“The Endangered Species Act provides the protection and resources needed for the Service and our partners to help this species recover,” said Robyn Thorson, Regional Director for the Service’s Great Lakes-Big Rivers region. “We believe the Missouri bladderpod is no longer in immediate danger of extinction and should be reclassified to threatened. We will continue to work toward our ultimate goal of removing it from the Endangered Species list.”

Publication of the Service’s proposal begins a process during which the Service will accept public comments about the proposal and analyze them before making a final decision whether to reclassify the Missouri bladderpod to threatened.

The Missouri bladderpod is an annual plant about eight inches tall. Bright yellow flowers bloom in late April or early May. The species is found in the shallow soils of limestone glades in Christian, Dade, Greene, and Lawrence counties in southwestern Missouri, and at one site in Washington County, Arkansas. The species has also been discovered on one dolomite glade in Izaard County, Arkansas.

For more information about the Service’s proposal to reclassify the Missouri bladderpod, visit the Service’s website at <http://midwest.fws.gov/endangered/>. Comments on the proposal will be accepted by the Service for 60 days following publication of the proposal in the Federal Register and may be submitted to Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 608 East Cherry Street, Room 200, Columbia, Missouri 65201-7712. Comments may also be submitted electronically to bladderpod@fws.gov or by fax to 573/876-1914.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.